

Attorney General's Office Warns Delawareans About Vacation Rental Scams

With people already making summer vacation plans, the Consumer Protection Unit of the Delaware Department of Justice warns Delawareans to be careful when looking for a vacation rental. Scammers operating rental schemes find legitimate rental postings and capture the information and photos of the property, and then list it on Craigslist or other online advertising platforms. Unsuspecting consumers looking for a good deal on a vacation rental find the bogus posting, send a deposit, and receive confirmation of their rental only to arrive to find other people in the home, unable to gain access, or otherwise turned away from the property they believed they had rented.

Scams also can occur with regards to long term leases for homes or apartments, where scammers may even have changed the locks illegally on a property and allow someone to move in, even though they are not the true owner.

All consumers should be diligent before entering into any type of lease for a rental property or providing any deposit or rental payment by taking these steps first:

- Consider working with a licensed realtor or property management company when possible;
- If using an online search engine or website, research whether the property appears on other websites or listing platforms and make contact with the listing agents to determine which is the legitimate advertisement;
- Research who the true owner of the property is by doing a parcel search online: In Delaware, one can search New Castle County properties at

<http://www3.nccde.org/parcel/search/>; Kent County properties at <http://kent400.co.kent.de.us/PropInfo/PIName.HTM>, and Sussex County properties at, <https://sussexcountyde.gov/zoning-and-sales-information>;

- Carefully review the posting, advertisement or lease for misspellings and grammatical errors;
- If you are looking at a rental through an online listing site, you should familiarize yourself with the site's policies for detecting and dealing with potentially fraudulent listings;
- Never pay any security deposit or rental payment in cash—always use a check, money order or credit card—and demand a receipt;
- For long-term leases:
 - o Demand a written lease in advance, that includes the identification and contact information of the landlord, as well as identification of the bank where your security deposit (if applicable) will be held;
 - o When possible, request a walk-through before agreeing to rent or paying any deposit;
 - o Talk to neighbors to learn more about the property and the owners—be cautious of properties with a recently deceased owner or foreclosure;
 - o If you meet the person claiming to be the landlord, request to see their credentials, such as a business card or realtor's license, and identification; you should also make note of the make and model of their car and the license plate number.

Consumers who believe they may have been scammed should contact their local police department and file a report. They can also call the Attorney General's toll-free Consumer Hotline at 1-800-220-5424 or email the Consumer Protection Unit of DOJ at consumer.protection@delaware.gov. If the listing was posted on an online platform, such as Craigslist, the consumer should also file complaints with the online

platform and with federal law enforcement at www.ic3.gov.